

ENGL 234: DRAMA

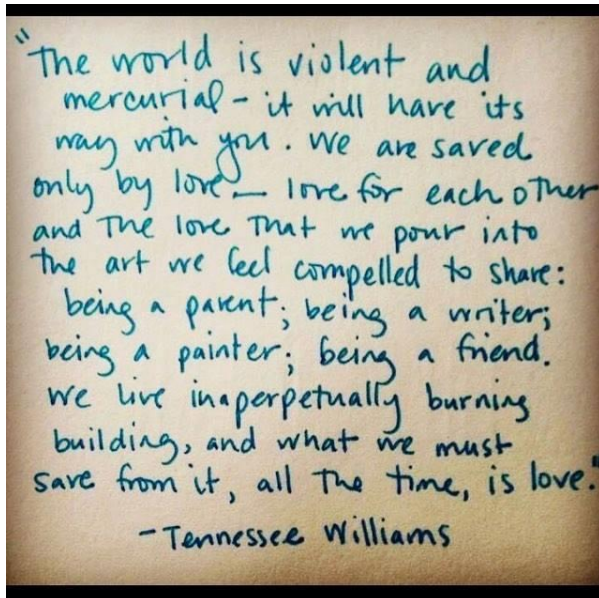
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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs: 1:00-2:00

Fall 2016

political stages / loving passages

*They tore the railroad down
so the Sunshine Special can't run
I'm going away baby
build me a railroad of my own*

Blind Lemon Jefferson
qtd. in August Wilson's
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom



"The world is violent and mercurial - it will have its way with you. We are saved only by love - love for each other and the love that we pour into the art we feel compelled to share: being a parent; being a writer; being a painter; being a friend. We live in a perpetually burning building, and what we must save from it, all the time, is love."
- Tennessee Williams



Course Description

We will begin with the idea that art can not only reflect the world, but change it, make it better. From its ancient roots, the stage has always been political. For this it has been both praised and condemned.

This course will consider twentieth-century and contemporary US American drama as a site for social change. We will study several theatrical forms—social realist, workers' theatre, epic drama, and documentary theatre—and consider plays that inspire conversations about democracy, global citizenship, spirituality, sexuality, race and racism, militarism, AIDS, and the criminal justice system. We will discuss whether certain forms seem particularly well-suited for moving audiences to action or if, as Tony Kushner suggests, there is not a "hierarchy to political efficaciousness."

We will follow three modes of inquiry—reading, writing, and performing. You will be reading plays, theatre reviews, and literary scholarship; writing brief reflections and one formal essay; creating a podcast and cooperating with one another to create dynamic performances for the class.

Our goal is to explore the public dimension of drama and to better understand this world we both inhabit and create.

Required Plays

Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour*

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead*

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, *The Exonerated*

August Wilson, *Two Trains Running*

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*

COURSE GOALS

To activate your intellectual imaginations

To learn about theatrical forms

To work together productively, efficiently, and creatively

To learn to ask compelling, insightful questions *through performance*

To strengthen your critical thinking skills

To express your ideas with confidence and clarity in writing and discussion

To build a cooperative intellectual community

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completing this course, a student should be able to:

1. Analyze complex sections of a dramatic work
2. Identify major theatrical forms in twentieth-century and contemporary US drama
3. Make meaningful connections between a play and other literary and cultural texts
4. Collaborate with others to create an original performance
5. Contribute with confidence to class discussion
6. Write concise and creative responses to literary works

English Major Program Goals

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Not all English courses will address all three goals, but the major curriculum as a whole provides opportunities to address these goals.

REQUIREMENTS

1) Four reflections	20 points
2) Midterm Exam	25 points
3) Participation/Performance	25 points
4) Final Essay (5-6 pp)	30 points
Optional Democracy Project	Participation

1) **Four Reflections (500 words each)**

You will write four reflections on our plays. Reflections are a chance for you to focus on a dramatic work in writing. Rather than taking on an entire work, try to focus each reflection on a particular scene, idea, quotation, or image. These responses may provide you with an idea for the final essay or democracy project. Due dates are on the schedule. See the sample on ECampus/ Course Information.

In each reflection, be sure to do the following:

- 1) Include at least **three direct quotations** from the play and provide page numbers in parenthesis after the quote.
- 2) Compose idea-driven and coherent paragraphs. In each paragraph, offer a topic sentence, develop a single important idea or observation, and transition into the next paragraph or, in the final paragraph, conclude your reflection.

****Please read and incorporate these suggestions for writing good paragraphs.

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Paragraphing.html>

- 3) Upload your reflections on ECampus under “Discussions” in the appropriate folder by the due date.

Further Suggestions:

- ✓ Pose a genuine question about the play—a question you cannot answer easily
- ✓ Analyze a quotation closely and situate it within the overall meaning of the play
- ✓ Explore a visual image
- ✓ Define a key word or phrase
- ✓ Imagine how you would stage a scene or how you would cast certain roles
- ✓ Reflect on the contemporary relevance of the play
- ✓ For ONE of your reflections, you can submit a creative response. See Sample under “Course Information”

Need Writing Help?

The Writing Studio strives to help all members of the university community learn more about effective communication practices. Professional and friendly consultants work one-to-one on all stages of the writing (or speaking) process, from note-taking and pre-writing to revision strategies, proofreading techniques, and presentation practice. Because the Writing Studio works to teach students ways to improve their own work, consultants will not proofread, edit content, or discuss grades. It is helpful to bring your assignment prompt with you on your visit. To make an appointment, call 304.293.5788 or visit the Writing Studio website (<http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>).

2) **Participation, Attendance, & Performance Group** ***Participation***

This class will strengthen your ability *to think*—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. If this course were only about reading plays, we could all do that by ourselves. If it were only about listening to what one person has to say about literature, we could all find a great lecture online. But English courses are about more

than reading and writing and the acquisition of information. They are also about learning to think analytically and creatively.

I understand the pressure, uncertainty, and boredom that can lead to silence in the classroom. I will do my best to create an atmosphere conducive to a free flow of ideas. If you ever have any concerns, let me know.

Always be prepared for class. If you do not have the literary work under discussion, you are not prepared!

In addition to the obvious ways to participate, on any day you can write a significant quotation from our literary work on the board for us to discuss. Also, I will often ask for students to prepare two discussion questions.

Attendance

You are allowed three absences for whatever reason. **If you miss more than three classes, unless there is a documented emergency, you will fail the class.** (See emergency policy below.) Please consider carefully whether this is the class for you this semester.

Routine tardiness will count as one absence.

Performance Groups

Everyone will be in a performance group. Your group will collaborate on a ten-minute, ungraded performance. Think of these performances as a gift to the class. You will have class time to prepare. Groups might choose to:

- Act a brief, important scene -- and then re-enact it with a different interpretation
- Highlight a play's relevance to current events
- Perform an interview with the characters and/or the playwright
- Change the setting, or one of the characters, to make a point about the original
- Incorporate music, props, lighting, costumes
- Put a play in dialogue with a painting, a drawing, a song, etc.
- Break the fourth wall and include audience members in the performance

3) Midterm Exam

The in-class midterm exam will consist of short-answer and essay questions. You will be able to consult with the plays and one page of notes.

4) Final Essay (5-6 pp)

At the end of the semester, you will write an essay on a play or plays of your choice. There will be a chance to workshop drafts and receive instructor feedback.

Optional Democracy Project

At the end of the semester, we will be invited to create a podcast with students in ENGL 258: Pop Culture. For this project, you would choose lines from our plays that could respond to the question: "What does democracy sound like?" As we read our plays, keep track of quotations that might work for this project. I will give you more information down the road.

GRADING SCALE

A+ (98-100) ; A (97-94) ; A- (93-91) ; B+ (90-88) ; B (87-84) ; B- (83-81) ; C+ (80-78) ; C (77-74); C- (73-71); D (61-70) ; F (60 or below)

PROCEDURES and EXPECTATIONS

ECampus and Email

The syllabus and select course materials are available on ECampus. I will record points for each assignment on ECampus. I will use your MIX email accounts to communicate with you. Please check those accounts regularly.

Plagiarism/Cheating. The following definitions are from the *West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog*. Please see the section on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of procedures.

Plagiarism: material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others . . . including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition.

Cheating: doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as their own.

Scholastic dishonesty: involves misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; interfering with another's work.

Clear cases of plagiarism or cheating may result in an F for the course. If you have any question about how to document sources, please talk to me.

Cell Phone Courtesy. Please turn off cell phones for class.

Inclusivity Statement. The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

Disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services. Accessibility Services is located in Suite 250 at 1085 Van Voorhis Rd (beside Applebee's and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center). 304-293-6700; access2@mail.wvu.edu; <http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>.

Emergencies or Health Crises. If you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, once you have the opportunity, you should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me. Please reserve the Dean's services for serious circumstances.

SCHEDULE

- Thurs. Aug 18 Syllabus and Introductions
What would you change if you could?
What is drama? Theatre? Performance?
- Tues. Aug 23 Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* Act 1
Aristotle on tragedy
? Are characters in movies/TV better or worse than real people?
Sign up for Performance Groups
- Thurs. Aug 25 *The Children's Hour* Act 2
Bring two quotations to discuss
- Tues. Aug 30 *The Children's Hour* Act 3
Harry Gilroy's Opening Comments
- Thurs. Sept 1 *The Children's Hour*
Jenny Spencer, "Sex, Lies, and Revisions: Historicizing Hellman's *The Children's Hour*" in *Modern Drama* (2004)
- Tues. Sept 6 Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* 1-28
- Thurs. Sept 8 *Bury the Dead*
First Reflection Due (to *Children's Hour* or *Bury the Dead*)
- Tues. Sept 13 Douglas McDermott, "The Workers' Laboratory Theatre: Archetype and Example." *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1930*. Eds. Bruce McConachie and Daniel Friedman. Wesport, CN: Greenwood P, 1985.
- Thurs. Sept 15 **Performances of *Children's Hour* and *Bury the Dead***
Tony Kushner, etc., "How Do You Make Social Change," *Theater* 31.1 (2001)
- Tues. Sept 20 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* Act 1; Langston Hughes' "Harlem" (Epigram)
- Thurs. Sept 22 *A Raisin in the Sun* Act 2
- Tues. Sept 27 *A Raisin in the Sun* Act 3
Second Reflection Due (to *Raisin*)
- Thurs. Sept 29 *A Raisin in the Sun*
Introduction by Robert Nemiroff
- Tues. Oct 4 **Performance of *A Raisin in the Sun***. Review for Midterm
- Thurs. Oct 6 **Midterm Exam**

- Tues. Oct 11 *The Exonerated* 1-42
- Thurs. Oct 13 *The Exonerated* (entire play)
- Tues. Oct 18 *The Exonerated* (film version)
- Thurs. Oct 20 August Wilson, *Two Trains Running* Act 1
- Tues. Oct 25 August Wilson, *Two Trains Running* Act 2
Third Reflection Due (to *Exonerated* or *Two Trains*)

Oct 26—Last Day to Drop with a W

- Thurs. Oct 27 *Two Trains Running*
- Tues. Nov 1 *Two Trains Running*
- Thurs. Nov 3 **Performances of *The Exonerated* and *Two Trains Running***

Mon. Nov 7—7:30 Talk by Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*

- Tues. Nov 8 *Angels in America*, Part One, Act One
- Thurs. Nov 10 *Angels in America*, Part One, Act Two
Fourth Reflection due (to *Angels* or *Trains*)
- Tues. Nov 15 *Angels in America*, Part One, Act Three
Optional: Democracy Reflection due
- Thurs. Nov 17 *Angels in America*, Part Two, Acts One-Two

By Friday, Nov 18, noon, opening three or four paragraphs of final essay due, including thesis statement. This writing counts toward your final essay evaluation

Thanksgiving Break

- Tues. Nov 29 *Angels in America*, Part Two (entire play)
Essay Drafts due
- Thurs. Dec 1 *Angels*. Writing Workshop
- Tues. Dec 6 Review and Concluding Thoughts / Podcast Rehearsal

Democracy Project Recording on Wed. Dec 7, 2:30 – 4:30 in Colson 130

Final Essay due Friday, Dec.9, by noon on ECampus. (If you are doing the podcast, you can turn in the essay on Saturday, Dec. 10, by noon.)

English Dept. Readings

Thursday, September 22: Alysia Burton Steele, in the Media Innovation Center
<http://www.alysiaburton.com> (time uncertain!)

Monday, October 10: Sturm writer Valerie Boyd, 7:30 in the Robinson Reading Room
<http://www.valerieboyd.com>

Monday, October 24: Beth Macy, 7:30 in the Robinson Reading Room
<https://intrepidpapergirl.com>

WVU Creative Arts – Fall Theatre Schedule

Race by David Mamet

September 23 - October 2, 2016

“Race,” by David Mamet, in the Gladys G. Davis Theatre, Creative Arts Center, Sept. 23-Oct. 2: Three lawyers are forced to confront their own feelings about race when they’re offered the chance to defend a white man charged with a crime against a black woman. David Mamet’s customarily crackling dialogue and startling plot twists are the building blocks of a probing and intelligent look at some of the most controversial and important issues of our time. Directed by Jerry McGonigle.

Noises Off by Michael Frayn

October 20 - 23, 2016

“Noises Off,” by Michael Frayn. in the Metropolitan Theatre, Morgantown, Oct. 20-23: Things go from bad to worse to beyond chaotic as a rag-tag theatre troupe prepares for the opening night of a new comedy, “Nothing On.” Onstage mishaps and backstage backstabbing reach laugh-out-loud heights in this classic comedic farce. Directed by Lee Blair.

***The Trojan Women* by Euripides, translated and adapted by Gwendolyn MacEwen**

November 17 - 18, 29, and December 4, 2016

“The Trojan Women,” by Euripides, Translated and Adapted by Gwendolyn MacEwen, in the Gladys G. Davis Theatre, Creative Arts Center, Nov. 17-18, 29-Dec. 4: A meditation on the true cost of war, “The Trojan Women” raises up the voices of the survivors of Troy’s fall to the Greeks as they learn their fates. Separation, despair, and death -- along with sharp and painful lessons -- await the women of Troy in this magnificent and timeless tragedy. Directed by Jay Malarcher.

Performance Groups Sign Up

Sign Up for ONE performance

Tues. Sept 15: *Children's Hour*

Tues. Sept 15: *Bury the Dead*

Thurs. Oct 4 *A Raisin in the Sun*

Thurs. Nov 3 *The Exonerated*

Thurs. Nov 3

Two Trains Running
